Quiddities

Adam Fieled

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Apologia

Ezra Pound famously remarked that when poetry strays too far from music, it ceases to be poetry. I would like to opine, as a tangent thought to his, that when the higher arts stray too far from philosophy, they cease to be the higher arts. Philosophy, no less than literature, is a series of narratives; and that higher-end, intellectually ambitious literature should twirl and torque meaningfully around philosophical quandaries and discourses is something that English-language poetry has forgotten in the last half-century (and I mean "pure" philosophy, as differentiated from literary theory or aesthetics). The leveling process by which no distinctions between high and low art are made, as a precondition to post-modernity's preponderance, has effaced interest in the "fundamental questions" in favor of narrow, nihilistic ironies and corrosive but intellectually superficial cultural critiques. But that, without reprising Romanticism, English language poetry can reclaim interest in pure philosophy and the crux questions of human existence, is the assumption these poems make. As such, they are angled against everything in the English language oeuvre after T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets, including the array of Deconstructive, non-narrative poetics, which confuse the respective (though not completely antithetical) functions of philosophy and poetry in an excessive and demeaning alienation of the aesthetic.

How my approach differs from Eliot's is this— rather than compressing the sensory data relevant to his inquiry into succinct forms, he prefers to paint on a wide canvas. The sharp points of his piece, often expressed in axioms and aphorisms, suffer a dissipated sense of being too generalized; an intermittent chiasmus with the tactile is represented, but focus is all too often lost in digression and imprecisely motivated meanderings. Many of Eliot's axioms are, in fact, quotations (from, among others, Heraclitus and St. John of the Cross); and his Modernistic allusiveness chips away at the potential philosopher's stone of original cognition for him. The poems in Quiddities are compressed and formed in the manner of John Keats' Odes; not, of course, that the poems are odes, just that they are meant to convey mystery-in-brevity; and a sense, however sodden with disillusionment and despair, of enchantment. For enchantment in intellectual mystery, where English language verse is concerned, few poems but these Apparition Poems after the English Romantics will suffice. Modernism and post-modernism presented many shortcuts to a sense of engaged cognition; but the full enchantment of the depths and mysteries of the human mind and its powers of perception and discernment was not perceived or represented. Impulses which could have led to these representations were deemed too earnest, in a milieu and context which prized irony, and mistrust of any form of depth, especially subjectively maintained cognitive-affective depth, with or against impulses which could be deemed Romantic.

If Quiddites is not merely a reprise of Romantic impulses, it is because the mysteries the poems encompass and close on are not comforting. Wordsworth's conception of intellectual enchantment is positivist; he follows a pedagogical path to teach us, with a discrete, didactic, and circumscribed system, how to think. This is the thematic backbone of The Prelude, his masterpiece. Intellectual man, he informs us, can always fall back on Nature; and Nature has the capacity to endlessly replenish intellectual man. The other major Romantics offer more naïve versions of the same intermittently comforting premise; even if Byron and Keats have ways of building levels of permanent encroaching darkness into their visions, too. The intellectual enchantment in Quiddities ends in itself; the poems offer no system as a transcendental antidote, and nothing is endlessly replenishing in the poems except

the endless montage of thought (thoughts on more thoughts). The enchantment offered by Quiddities is strange and (in a contradictory way) bitter; cognition has no recourse but to recur endlessly, in a sensory landscape as blasted and dystopic as the poems themselves. To circle back to Eliot again, where Quiddities is concerned; it is cognition over the (or a) waste land. But that the human intellect can and should develop its own kind of narcissism, over the dictatorial narcissism of the senses, especially in America, is presupposed. The human mind is the only enchanted place with any genuine permanence for mankind; that is the key and primordial supposition here.

Adam Fieled, 2013

#717

On why it has to be that writing
comfortable garbage is the inevitable
byproduct of living comfortably, with
each fresh hell I wonder why the hooks
towards artful utterance are set this
way, and why I must become such an oyster
just to confer into a leaking bucket,
insecurely hung from abraded cables,
a blue droplet not even of blood but
of nectar, or wine, or whiskey—

#1345

Two hedgerows with a little path
between— to walk in the path like
some do, as if no other viable route
exists, to make Gods of hedgerows
that make your life tiny, is a sin of
some significance in a world where
hedgerows can be approached from
any side— I said this to a man who
bore seeds to an open space, and he
nodded to someone else and whistled
an old waltz to himself in annoyance.

What Needs No Myth

after W.B. Yeats

The actuality of summer leaves wavering—
water gushing from springs— wind redolent
with sap— will never be enough to fill great
chasms of self-consciousness, emptiness of

death-fearing despair. If we could only learn
to watch waves of the sea— what needs no
myth never stops coming. No Sphinx waits in
the desert— nothing slouches towards Bethlehem—

no preternatural reality waits to replace what
never was. Ghosts predominate— slouch, blood-
dimmed tide built into them. Meanwhile, actual
falcons manifest the miracle of flight— harbingers

of the endless— winging the air, persevering.
It is a matter of mathematics, of where the numbers
end. Or space, our real home— inscrutably expansive,
unbelievable. There is no judgment in space.

Asteroids come out of the void— full-bodied, hurtling,
bent on something. Stars live and die, to no
appreciable avail comprehensible to us. There is
enough wonder in the Universe to befuddle

a thousand sages. Jesus on the cross is simple
by comparison. Each reductive model bends
the Collective Unconscious further towards
breakage. Sodden with suffering, the great

unassimilated incorrigibly search beneath
the stratosphere. Who understands that
breaking the circle is a precondition to well-
roundedness? Having achieved existence,

even Buddha sat by the bo tree a little
eternity, rounding myths into pebbles, pebbles
into myths—

#1613

Follow Abraham up the hill:
to the extent that the hill is
constituted already by kinds
of knives, to what extent can
a man go up a hill, shepherd
a son to be sacrificed, to be
worthy before an almighty
power that may or may not
have had conscious intentions

where hills, knives, sons were
concerned, but how, as I watch
this, can I not feel that Abraham,
by braving knives, does not need
the one he holds in his rapt hands?

#1617

Philosophy says that poets want to lose.
What are conditions of losing: to whom?
The conditions (to whom they concern, to

unrepresented phantoms, mostly) are colors,
which, to transcribe, require a solid core of
nebulous necromancy which philosophy calls

(for its own poetic reasons) "loss." I took this
from one strictly (which necessitated looseness
towards me) for himself, took several median

blended colors and painted a razor on the roof
of a red building. Then I fell off. But I lived.

#1622

Poor Schopenhauer's axioms:
all in the will is a fight to beat
other wills. I see him in his
meager room, his will bent
not to do much, save himself
the trouble of fighting these
ineluctable battles, but not
able to refrain from eating,
breathing, shitting, fucking,
all those simple acts that are
will-to-survival, but Arthur
casts himself into a future of
power, not knowing when it
arrived it was to be a crass joke,
ended with face in turtle soup.

#1625

The "I" that writes cannot be
(he told us, perched on a hill of
flowers which he crushed, but, of
course, incompletely, and not all of
them at once) strictly for-itself as it
has no substance: a student walked

up, pricked his forearm (the back side
of it) with a small razor, he cringed but
only briefly, leaning forward so that a
row of buttercups doused him yellow.
The "I" that writes has a relationship
that is very much for itself, but it has

a strictly independent existence, so that
what constitutes a human "I" has no
meaning for it. Now, you need to know
this: I was not the student with the razor,
but I supplied the razor to the student
that cut the professor's forearm, but you

will never know how I got it, or why.

#1547

this is
what
words
amount
to—
festivals
of ash,
collapsed
into urns,
held
up by
timid folk
for the
bold to
scatter.

#1614

Set him in place: the Creator of the Universe.
For whatever reason Abraham might experience
a sense of being called, let's say that Abraham
is correct. The call is there, or was made. Since
the Creator of the Universe is a God, not a man,
what the query would be, or consist of, does begin
from the grounds of perfect truthfulness, immaculate
sagacity, consummate insight. I no longer believe
the Creator would call for Isaac's death. In my not
consummate imagination, which also cannot believe

human sagacity may achieve perfection, it nonetheless seems
the Creator has another question for Abraham to answer.
The incision is: Abraham is asked to prove, demonstrate, that
Isaac is really his son. How is he really your son? The dream
of family, among the human race, as a veil of Maya, at least
sometimes, is clouded by shrouds placed on reality, fatty
degeneration of surface tissue, the ancient quality of souls
lost in people thrown around. The Creator— conscious,
unconscious, personal, impersonal— is not looking for
blood. Why would he? Dumb for the Creator to ask for.

What the Creator wants is simply the truth manned
beneath the surface, what's perfectly there. Does Abraham?

#1616

The God who would have Isaac killed, you
might discover, was a pimp God. The administered
test, to Abraham, was a pimp test. The conscious,
personal portion of this God, creating illusions
of singularity, was initiating & completing a pimp
task. This, also, you might discover. What is past
our comprehension is there, too. What looks like
a pimp to us— who knows? But that the imposition
on Abraham pimps out something to Abraham—
a goomba-like, or pimpish, dispensation— this, you
need to know, is how it occurs to us that primordial
powers ooze their way up, into human consciousness—

or might, that is. You need to know & not know.
At the end, you judge that what they call God
is fashioned from human brains. That part is
simple. Myths stick or don't stick. Myths become
Gods-in-themselves: conscious, unconscious,
personal, impersonal. Myths are pimped out, too—

#1645

The father's gaze (depending which gaze
you happen to be referring to) is panoptic.
It goes in without leaving traces. So if you
have several fathers that leave no traces, &

merely invisible gazes, there is or maybe a
sense in which you have no fathers. I saw
all this happening to me, along with every
thing else, many years ago, before I could

visualize the cell I was in, before I knew
how the walls stank of fresh paint, or saw
that I was getting smeared at any juncture.
But, as I saw this, my father who was my

father turned, spoke down to me in such
a way that I listened. I took what he said,
gazed at my cell, and watched the paint dry
deep into the night before I busted out to

watch the dawn break over the Delaware.

#2043

For God to be God
God has to be something else
the manifestation of a center point
of perfectly well-rounded goodness
incorrigibly manning the ambiguous
affirming all sides of every equation
responsive both personally, impersonally
conscious and unconscious

but then, being there and not somewhere else
the Ontological Argument falls flat
God's not God
for God to be God

#2044

What if, really and truly,
the God that made us
was beneath us? What if
we emerged from ooze,
call it primordial, that was
itself a matrix for an eternity
of half-made garbage, and one
millennium, the entire universe
just slipped out— an accident?
There we were, all of us, at 1.0,
those elite-brained imposing
spatial-temporal dimensions
on time, space. Pygmies, also,
pushed down towards tiny
existences, hating 1.0 very much,
as an enemy like taxes, always there—

#1476

Days follow days off cliffs—
do these things we do have
any resonance, do they rise
into the ether, or are they to
be ground down into pulp,
briefly making earth sodden,
then dissipated dust scattered
over plains too vast, blasted
with winds, rains, storms, to
be counted or harvested?

#1901

Conshohocken power lines in the rain—
edges of buildings cut through whitened
sky, as rising light topples privacy for
squat-dwellers on the Schuylkill— I see
power defining itself in lines, acrobatic,
space-consonant, but always working
within suburban, subaltern parameters—
eternity decoyed from a rusty beneath.

#1480

How horrendous, to realize there
are people in the world with no
soul, walking zeros, hollow spaces,
dead end interiors, permanently
frozen faculties, how horrendous
to watch how they borrow words
of others to sound profound, but
each echo reveals there's nothing
behind it but the kind of charred
silence that comes after a corpse
is burnt— how horrendous, how
it makes some of us cling to what
we feel, how we feel, that we feel,
and that everything we feel is so
precious, specifically (and only)
because it is felt, and stays felt.

#1281

You can take for granted
lots of God-awful garbage
in places deemed important
by fools; this goes for every
thing, including poetry. Why?
Because the world runs (has,
will always) on mediocrity, so
safe, so comforting, like a mug
of hot cocoa on a winter's night,
or a mediocre simile, people want
others to be mediocre, to be fools,
that's just the way things go, people
are nothing to write home about, or
(if you are writing to God) nothing to
write about at all, the world is no mystery,
all the mystery is in the night sky, looking up.

#1241

Why does no one tell the truth?
Because the truth is (more often
than not) absurd. No one wants
to look absurd, so no one tells
the truth, which creates even
more absurdity; worlds grow
into self-parody, systems grow
down into gutters, whole epochs
are wasted in perfidy; Cassandra
finally opens her mouth, no one
listens, they want her to star in
a porno, set her up with a stage-
name, she learns not to rant,
visions cloud her eyes, cunt—

#1346

The righteous man or woman, God or Goddess,
who bears seeds to open spaces, knows, regardless
of prejudice, this: a sin is no sin if it's all you have
in you. What's in us, the human race, is what's had,
what's real, what we are. There's no sense planting
against what's real. The idealist coughs, panting
after the oblivion of the fictitious. Our relevant particular
is L-shaped, compounded of one big perpendicular—
us, what's real, what we are. Endless tug of war.
They've got the numbers, we've got the swords—
it was all in a nod, third-party directed, to take
him in, question him, let someone else remake
his brains, while the L-shaped fiasco's replanted.
Happy to be real is happy to be pedantic.

#1351

Once you learn the L, what it implies—
a stalemated race— the sky, clouds inhering,
bodies of water, stately mountains, grass,
the entire nine yards of it, all bent
into form as something humiliatingly past
your comprehension— then the L again,
what the human brain could be if not
plagued by child-like conditions—

mountains, perhaps it's the mountains
which move you the most, as words wind
their way into place, because a mountain
is what you most want to make, something
immovable, permanent, durable, solid,
something on your side of things, against
the other, which receives your ricochet,
waits to chop you, your mountain down to size—

#1067

I want to last—
to be the last
of the last of
the last to be

taken by time,
but the thing
about time is
that it wants,

what it wants
is us, all of us
wane quickly
for all time's

ways, sans "I,"
what I wants—

#2051

Each day, I'm hollowed by
the Recession's vacuum, and either
create my life or perish— no sense
of safety or coherence from a storied
past. As I walk Conshohocken's
streets, I note the sky, just before
dawn, amusing itself in pastels—
ice on branches over tiny front/
back yards— all held self-sufficiently
in time's objective indifference,
which I now feel passionately about,
for & against, December's circuits—

Credits

Artrecess2— 1625

Eratio Postmodern Poetry— 717, "What Needs No Myth"

Fixator Press— 1547

Great Works (UK)— 1067

Ink Pantry— 2051

Jacket Magazine— 1345, 1476, 1480

PFS Post— 1613, 1645

Stoning the Devil— 1168, 1241

Tears in the Fence— 1901

(all poems but "What Needs…" in this collection are drawn from *Apparition Poems*)